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PAGE 01 BUENOS 01102 01 OF 02 261628Z
ACTION ARA-16

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BUENOS 01102 01 OF 02 261628Z

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INFO OCT-00 ADS-00 AID-07 INR-10 SS-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
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SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 1102

E.O. 12065: RDS-4 2/25/2002 (FRIEDMAN, T.B.) OR-P
TAGS: AR, SHUM
SUBJECT: ARMY LEADER LASHES OUT AT HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

1. SUMMARY: ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF VAQUERO HAS CONDEMNED ARGENTINE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AS WITTINGLY OR UNWITTINGLY AIDING INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. HIS COMMENTS, THE HARSHTEST PUBLIC CONDEMNATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS THAT WE CAN RECALL, REFLECTS A WELL DEVELOPED POINT OF VIEW WITHIN ELEMENTS OF THE MILITARY, PARTICULARLY THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES. THEY ARE ALSO CONNECTED TO THE MILITARY'S FRUSTRATION AT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS IN KEEPING THE ISSUE OF THE DISAPPEARED ALIVE. HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS HAVE A VARIETY OF MOTIVATIONS BUT ONE OF THEM IS TO BRING THE MILITARY TO ACCOUNTS FOR THE WAY THEY CONDUCTED THE "DIRTY WAR". SUCH AN ACCOUNTING CAN ONLY COME, AS THEY AND THE ARMED FORCES KNOW, IF THE ARMED FORCES HOLD ON THE GOVERNMENT IS DECISIVELY BROKEN. DESPITE VAQUERO'S HARSHNESS, OTHERS CLOSE TO PRESIDENT GALTIERI HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY RECOGNIZE THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS HAVE IMPORTANT CONSTITUENTS ABROAD, INCLUDING IN THE UNITED STATES. THUS, THOUGH COME IN THE MILITARY MAY BE PRESSING FOR A CRACKDOWN, WE DO NOT SEE ONE COMING IN THE NEAR FUTURE. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ARGENTINE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF MGEM JOSE ANTONIO VAQUERO HAS PUBLICLY AND HARSHLY ATTACKED ARGENTINE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS.

3. (U) SPEAKING AT A CEREMONY IN WHICH HE AWARDED A MEDAL TO HIS SALVADORAN COLLEAGUE, COL. RAFAEL FLORES LIMA, VAQUERO STATED THAT ON THE ONE HAND THERE ARE THOSE WHO COMBAT "ARMED SUBVERSION" WHILE ON THE "OTHER EXTREME" THERE ARE THE "SO CALLED SOLIDARITY ORGANIZATIONS" (A REFERENCE TO HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS). THE LATTER, HE SAID, "APPEAR TO BE INDEPENDENT ENTITIES. BUT LET US NOT BE NAIVE, THEY ARE SERVING, WITTINGLY OR NOT, THE CURRENT STRATEGY OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM". "THESE ORGANIZATIONS", VAQUERO SAID, "HAVE PROLIFERATED IN ARGENTINA PROTECTED BY THE LIBERTY THEY SURELY HOPE TO DESTROY".

4. COMMENT: VAQUERO'S COMMENTS REFLECT A WELL DEVELOPED ANALYSIS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS PREVALENT AMONG MANY MILITARY OFFICERS--AND ESPECIALLY IN ARMY INTELLIGENCE. ACCORDING TO THIS ANALYSIS, THE TERRORISTS, DEFEATED IN A TEST OF ARMS, ARE NOW TRYING TO DESTROY THE GOVERNMENT POLITICALLY USING THE ISSUE OF PAST AND PRESENT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, PARTICULARLY THE ISSUE OF THE DISAPPEARED. DEMONSTRATIONS IN

PARIS, CONDEMNATIONS IN THE UN, HUMAN RIGHTS PROTESTS IN ARGENTINA ARE ALL SEEN AS PART OF WHAT THE PROPONENTS OF THIS ANALYSIS, LIKE VAQUERO, SEE AS A LARGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY. TO BE SURE, THESE PROPONENTS SAY, THERE ARE SOME UNWITTING INNOCENTS INVOLVED--BUT THE DIRING FORCE COMES FROM INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE CONSCIOUSLY PART OF A LARGER PLOT, DRIVEN BY COMMUNISTS, AND ULTIMATELY THE SOVIET UNION.

5. AS IN SO MUCH ELSE HERE, THE ISSUE OF THE DISAPPEARED IS CENTRAL TO THIS WHOLE CONSPIRACY THEORY. THE MILITARY ONCE HOPED THAT THE ISSUE WOULD FADE WITH TIME. INSTEAD, IT HAS CONTINUED TO TORMENT ARGENTINA ABROAD AND IS GETTING INCREASING ATTENTION AT HOME. THE MILITARY, UNDERSTANDABLY, FEEL VULNERABLE. THEY ALSO IDENTIFY ARGENTINE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS, AS WELL AS EXILED LEFTISTS AND TERRORISTS, WHO ARE ACTIVE IN EUROPE AND MEXICO, AS HAVING KEPT THE ISSUE ALIVE AND INFLAMED. THEY ARE LESS ABLE TO SEE THAT WESTERN VALUES MADE IT NATURAL FOR MANY OTHERS TO REJECT THE LEGITIMACY OF DISAPPEARANCE AND TO CONDEMN ANY GOVERNMENT WHICH PRACTICES IT.

6. THERE ARE NOW SEVEN ARGENTINE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS. FOLLOWING ARE THEIR NAMES AND A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH:

A) THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (PAHR) FOUNDED IN THE MID-1970'S THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY BROUGHT TOGETHER COMMUNISTS, NON-COMMUNISTS AND EVEN ANTI-COMMUNISTS. THE COMMON CONCERN AMONG THEM WAS THE MASSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THEN TAKING PLACE. MANY OF THE ORGANIZERS HAD RELATIVES AMONG THE DISAPPEARED OR DETAINED. PAHR CENTERED ITS ACTIVITIES ON THE PROBLEM OF THE DISAPPEARED, COLLECTING THE

Argentina

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Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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PAGE 01
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SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 1102

BEST AND MOST COMPLETE DOCUMENTATION ON THIS PRACTICE AND PRESENTING HABEAS CORPUS PETITIONS ON BEHALF OF THE VICTIMS. THOUGHT THEY DID NOT AND PROBABLY STILL DO NOT CONTROL THE ORGANIZATION, THE ARGENTINE COMMUNISTS HAVE A MAJOR VOICE IN ITS OPERATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER OF THE PAHR IS A COMMUNIST. IN RECENT MONTHS THE PAHR HAS EXPANDED ITS ACTIVITIES TO ATTACK THE GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES;

B) THE CENTER FOR LEGAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES (CELS): FOUNDED IN 1980, CELS IS THE MOST PROFESSIONAL, RELIABLE AND AGGRESSIVE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS. ITS FOUNDERS, INCLUDING EMILIO MIGNONE AND AUGUSTO CONTE MACDONALD, WERE AND ARE ACTIVE IN THE PAHR (MIGNONE AND CONTE EACH HAS A DISAPPEARED CHILD). HOWEVER, TODAY MOST OF THEIR TIME IS TAKEN UP IN CELS--THEY HAVE NEVER TOLD US BUT WE BELIEVE THEY WERE UNHAPPY WITH THE COMMUNIST ROLE IN THE PAHR. IN KEEPING WITH THE MODUS VIVENTI BETWEEN THE GOV AND THE LOCAL PARTY, COMMUNISTS IN THE PAHR WERE OFTEN OPPOSED TO THE TACTICS AND STRATEGY OF THE CELS FOUNDER WHO WANTED THE ASSEMBLY TO BE MORE AGGRESSIVE. MOST OF THE LEADERS IN CELS ARE ALSO ACTIVE POLITICIANS: MIGNONE IS ALIGNED WITH THE "INTRANSIGENT" LEFT WING OF PERONISM, CONTE MACDONALD IS A LEADER OF THE MODERATE LEFTIST WING OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. (BOTH MEN, WE NOTE, HAVE PUBLICLY CONDEMNED EVENTS IN POLAND AND AFGHANISTAN).

C) THE ARGENTINE LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (THE LIGA): FOUNDED IN THE 1930'S THE ORGANIZATION IS A COMMUNIST FRONT, AND IS SO RECOGNIZED EVEN AMONG OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS. PEOPLE AT CELS, FOR EXAMPLE, PRIVATELY POKE FUN AT THE LIGA FOR ITS UNDENIABLE ALIGNMENT.

D) THE PEACE AND JUSTICE SERVICE: THIS IS THE ORGANIZATION HEADED BY 1980 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER ADOLFO PEREZ ESQUIVEL, PEACE AND JUSTICE'S CHIEF ORNAMENT. THE NOBEL PEACE AWARD TO THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS LEADER ENDOWED HIM WITH AN IMPORTANCE THAT HE HAD NOT EARNED THROUGH HIS EFFORTS IN ARGENTINA, WHERE THE MOVEMENT HAD FEW MEMBERS OR ELSEWHERE IN LATIN AMERICA WHERE IT REPORTED HAD EVEN FEWER. LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND THE GOVERNMENT WERE FOR ONCE UNITED--IN SURPRISE--WHEN THE NOBEL COMMITTEE TAPPED PEREZ. THE HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS WERE DELIGHTED TO HAVE SUCH A VISIBLE SYMBOL. THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, QUICKLY CONCLUDED THAT SINCE PEREZ WAS SUCH A RELATIVE NON-ENTITY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SCENE HIS DESIGNATION COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN THE RESULT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY TO GET ARGENTINA. FOR MANY MILITARY, PEREZ--WITH HIS INTERNATIONAL WANDERINGS--IS NOW THE EMBODIMENT THE CONSPIRACY THAT THEY ARE CONVINCED SURROUNDS THEM AND THAT VAQUERO DENOUNCED.

E) THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO: FOUNDED IN 1976 BY MOTHERS WHOSE CHILDREN DISAPPEARED, THE MOTHERS ARE A SINGLE ISSUE ORGANIZATION. OFTEN UNRELIABLE AS TO FACTS, BUT INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED POLITICALLY, THEY MORE THAN ANY OTHER BODY KEEP ALIVE THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM THAT SO INVOLVES THEM.

F) THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (EMHR): THIS BODY IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC CHURCHMEN. ITS ACTIVITIES DEAL MOSTLY WITH HELPING THE FAMILIES OF THE DETAINED AND RECENTLY RELEASED PRISONERS. IT IS RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT.

G) THE FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE DISAPPEARED AND DETAINED FOR POLITICAL REASONS: RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT, THIS BODY MAKES ITS HOME IN QUARTERS PROVIDED IT BY THE LIGA. IT IS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE UNDER COMMUNIST CONTROL, THOUGH WE CANNOT ATTEST ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ON THIS. IT DEVOTES MOST OF ITS ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION OF THE DETAINED.

7. GIVEN THEIR VARIETY, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ATTRIBUTE A SINGLE MOTIVE TO THE LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES. HOWEVER, MANY OF THOSE INVOLVED ARE DETERMINED TO MAKE THE MILITARY ANSWER FOR ITS TACTICS IN THE "DIRTY WAR." MOREOVER, ALL ARE HIGHLY POLITICIZED--RECOGNIZING THAT THEIR OBJECTIVES, IF THEY ARE TO BE ACHIEVED AT ALL, CAN ONLY COME THROUGH THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

8. VAQUERO'S COMMENTS REFLECT VERY CONSIDERABLE SENTIMENTS WITHIN THE MILITARY. HOWEVER, OTHERS--SOME OF THEM CLOSE TO PRESIDENT GALTIERI--HAVE RECENTLY TOLD US THAT THEY RECOGNIZE THAT HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS HAVE IMPORTANT CONSTITUENCIES ABROAD. SUB-SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR MENDEZ'S UNPRECEDENTED RECEPTION OF A CELS DELEGATION PROTESTING THE DISAPPEARANCE/MURDER OF ANA MARIA MARTINEZ ACKNOWLEDGED THE GOVERNMENT'S ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CELS. THUS, THOUGH WE SUSPECT THAT SOME IN THE ARMED FORCES MAY PRESS FOR SOME SORT OF CRACKDOWN ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS, WE DO NOT EXPECT THEM TO CARRY THE DAY, FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST. SHLAUDERMAN

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